

Cathy McMorris

7th District State Representative

1997 REPORT ON THE SESSION

Serving Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane and Stevens counties



Dear Friends,

With the 1997 state legislative session over, I wanted to give you a report on some of its unprecedented successes.

- For the first time in 40 years, the Legislature adjourned on time in a budget-writing year.
- For the first time in 20 years, our state's juvenile justice system was overhauled to give young criminals new respect for the law.
- After 60 years of welfare based on handouts, welfare reform stressing work and responsibility was adopted.
- The smallest biennial increase in 25 years for the state operating budget was approved.
- Spending for the 1997-99 biennium will grow only enough to account for inflation and population growth.
- Audits of huge state government agencies such as the departments of Labor and Industries and Transportation, some which have never had an outside audit, will be conducted.
- Education funding was increased to keep pace with inflation and enrollment, school construction needs were met and we made certain that more resources will be directed into the classroom. We also improved local control of schools and gave teachers more control of their classrooms.
- The Legislature approved more than \$400 million in tax cuts, with relief aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small businesses.

These are the kinds of state law changes that citizens have been seeking, and I am pleased to be a part of these efforts.

I hope that this report is a useful source of information for you about the legislative session and my efforts on behalf of our region. If you have any questions or ideas you'd like me to address, or if you would like to receive additional information about legislation, please do not hesitate to call, write or e-mail me.

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As chair of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, Rep. McMorris focuses on creating job opportunities for Washington's citizens.

THE VETO REPORT

The legislative process requires that any change in law be passed by a majority of the House and Senate and approved by the governor. Many improvements in our state's laws were made this year, but other bills backed by majorities in the House and Senate were vetoed by the governor.

A partial list of vetoes includes:

- \$195 million in property tax relief.
- \$90 million in business and occupation tax relief.
- A clear legal ban on same-sex marriage.
- Loggers' industrial insurance relief.
- Parents' right to know of psychological tests in schools.
- Most regulatory reform.
- State refusal to participate in the federal "Goals 2000" education reform.
- Allowing counties to reclaim county trust lands transferred to the state.
- Requiring welfare moms to name the father of dependent children.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT

Among the most frequent complaints I hear is that the state bureaucracy seems unaccountable and unresponsive. Other concerns mentioned include inefficiency and waste in state government.

I serve on the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), a bipartisan committee with an equal number of members from the House and Senate, which has responsibility for auditing state agencies' overall performance. Recently the other members chose me as their chairman.

Two additional areas of accountability in which progress was made are welfare fraud and land purchases. Several state agencies acquire land in the public interest, yet no one can say how much the state owns or how well it is managed. The capital budget we adopted this session calls for an inventory of all state lands.

Having heard from many citizens about welfare fraud, particularly in border communities, I proposed funding an independent fraud investigator. My bill caught the attention of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and although the agency lobbied against it, welfare fraud investigation was increased. I am working with DSHS to thoroughly look into examples of fraud cited by those of you responding to our last questionnaire.

Four major performance audits will be conducted by JLARC this year:

- JLARC will audit the Department of Transportation in response to public concern about finding ways to stretch transportation dollars further.
- JLARC will audit the Department of Labor and Industries' workers' compensation program, acting on complaints from many citizens dissatisfied with its performance.
- The new welfare reform system's 'Work First Program' to assist welfare recipients in getting jobs will be closely audited.
- The Department of Corrections will be audited to find ways to enhance the efficiency of our corrections system.

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CONSTITUENT REQUEST PACKAGE

For years I have collected ideas for legislation from citizens, and this session, I came up with 20 ideas which became legislative measures included in my Constituent Request Package. Five of these bills I consider successes.

House Bill 1702 Pesticide Applicators License Standards. New training and costs for pesticide applicators intended to improve safety actually had a negative effect. Ferry County's 160 applicators dwindled to less than 30, which meant either more people were applying pesticides without benefit of training, or weed control was seriously cut back. A pilot program for Ferry and Okanogan counties' weed applicators based upon HB 1702 is part of HB 1527, which passed into law.

House Bill 1705 Retention of Child Abuse Reports. DSHS' records system allowed unknown accusers to make unfounded claims, damaging the accused's reputation forever. I made certain that solutions I sought in HB 1705 became part of SB 5511, which was signed into law.

House Bill 1706 Community Network Boundaries. Some constituents felt "Community Networks" created in 1994 duplicated available state services and were heavy on administration but light on service. HB 1706 would have given county officials final say on letting them operate in the county. The final state budget reduced state spending on them from \$2.4 million to \$900,000 in the 1997-99 biennium. Federal funding, however, continues.

House Bill 1708 Farm Implement Salespeople. A farm implement dealer found current laws discouraged his commissioned salespeople from working more than 40 hours a week, while commissioned salespeople in similar jobs were exempt from the law and able to earn more. House Bill 1708, which extended the exemption to implement sales, passed and was signed by the governor.

House Bill 1710 School Technology. A state program to bring technology into public schools was mostly helping large westside school districts that had grant writers. HB 1710 would have made changes favoring districts and regions with technology deficiencies and financial need. The criteria became part of the final budget for allocating these technology grants for next biennium.

My Constituent Request Package's 25 percent success rate is almost triple the average rate of legislation passed, proving my belief that the best legislation comes from citizens. If you have ideas for legislation, please call, write me a letter, or let me hear from you at one of the community meetings I will be holding in the next few months.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

My heartfelt thanks goes to the five volunteer office interns who served in Olympia this past session. Angie Holmes (shown in photo), Joel Sorrell, Johnathan Breuer, Gael Rhodes and Daniel Miller were all of great assistance to me.

More volunteers are needed for next session. If you're interested or know someone who is, please contact me or visit with me after one of the community meetings which I will be holding in the next few months.



Doug Lane of Reardan, in foreground above, and Jack Gribble of Republic, below at the mike, testified in Olympia on behalf of their request bills.



To discuss legislative affairs and hear your suggestions for 1998, I'm holding a series of community meetings hosted by local organizations such as the chambers of commerce.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS.

Chewelah

June 19, Noon
Christian's

Colville

June 24, Noon
Cookie's

Creston

Oct. 6, 7 p.m.
Community Hall

Davenport

Oct. 16, Noon
Cottonwood

Deer Park

Aug. 19, Noon
Shagnasty's

Harrington

June 24, 6 p.m.
Memorial Hall

Ione

Sept. 8, 6 p.m.
Papa's

Kettle Falls

July 9, Noon
Donnie's

Metaline

Oct 9, 7 p.m.
Hoogie's

Newport

July 10, 6 p.m.
Fay's

Odessa

Aug. 26, Noon
Old Town Hall

Omak

July 15, Noon
Magoo's

Oroville

Sept. 25, 1 p.m.
Fao's

Republic

July 16, noon
Hometown Pizza

Spokane

Aug. 5, Noon
Chamber Bldg., 1020 W. Riverside

Spokane Valley

July 14, Noon
Percy's, 414 University Shopping Center

Sprague

Sept. 22, 7:30 p.m.
City Hall

Springdale

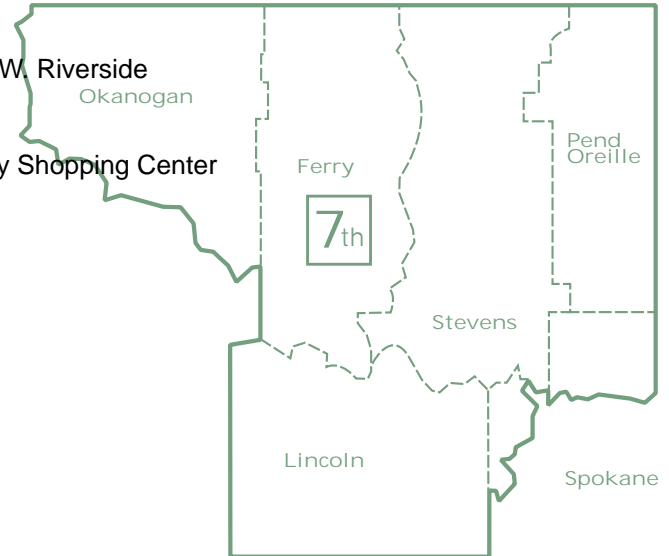
July 3, Noon
Geronimo's

Tonasket

July 8, Noon
Whistler's

Wilbur

July 22, Noon
Ma's Cafe



For more information about the location nearest you, please
get in touch with my office in Olympia at 360-786-7988.